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ABSTRACT

A major objective of the measurement profession continues to be the assurance of high quality tests and proper test use. The National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME) constitutes a group of testing practitioners, scholars, and specialists with well-informed opinions on matters of educational measurement and testing. NCME regards it as axiomatic that knowledges, skills, and abilities of people are important and relevant to individual, institutional, and societal goals, and that such characteristics and measurable. Although NCME believes that most admission tests are of high quality, it recognizes its obligation to monitor tests and test use. Some of the issues of concern to NCME in the admissions testing context are: tests producing inaccurate assessments of individuals; biased tests; the role of tests in selection decisions; and misuse of test information. The NCME, therefore, proposes the establishment of a broadly representative Commission on the Conduct by Educational Admissions Testing Programs to monitor and improve the conduct of admissions testing programs. (GK)

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NCME Statement on

EDUCATIONAL ADMISSIONS TESTING

What is NCME?

The National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME is an organization of testing practitioners, scholars, and specialists having as its primary goal the improvement of educational measurement practices and techniques. Its members include college professors who teach and carry on research in the testing field, persons responsible for the conduct of testing programs in state and local educational agencies, individuals in test development and research organizations, and test users. Together, the members constitute a group with well-informed opinions on matters of educational measurement and testing.

What Does NCME Stand For?

NCME regards it as axiomatic that the knowledges, skills, and abilities of people are important and relevant to individual, institutional, and societal goals, and that many of these characteristics are measureable. As corollaries. NCME endorses the following positions:

Many educational decisions can be improved by objective and equitable assessments of the achievements and characteristics of individuals.

Tests can provide such assessments which, in many instances, are more objective and more equitable than other forms of evaluation.

College, graduate, and professional school admissions decisions are among the educational decisions that can be improved by objective and equitable assessment of individual achievements and characteristics to the benefit of the individuals, the institutions, and society.

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> The extent to which tests can contribute to sound educational decisions depends on the intrinsic quality of the tests and on proper interpretation and use of test scores.

A major objective of the measurement profession continues to be the assurance of high quality tests and proper test use. Much has been done by the profession to achieve the present high level of test quality and use, and there is every expectation of continuing improvement. This statement, and the proposal which concludes it, is in the spirit of fostering that improvement through the professionals who have the knowledge and expertise about tests and testing, rather than through governmental involvement.

What Does NCME Advocate to Help Test Takers?

> Test takers should be provided with information on the range of knowledge and skills to be tested, the conditions under which a test is to be taken, the types of test questions to be included, and the way a test is to be scored.

This information should be easily available for each test and include, at a minimum, a description of the test, sample questions, a description of the testing conditions, and the scoring procedures to be used. It is desirable to make a complete form of a test or its equivalent available to all test takers. However, to meet this objective it is not necessary to make public all test questions and answers after a test's administration.

> Test takers should know that the test questions which they are called on to answer have not been made public prior to test administration.

If tests were released after administration, and some or all of their contents used again, some test takers would enjoy the opportunity of becoming familiar with the questions and answers. Thus, testing conditions in the future would not be equitable for all examinees, for it is clearly not fair that some, but not all, examinees have opportunity to become familiar in advance with the test content.

Making all test questions and answers public poses problems for the test developer that may result in increased costs and diminished services for the test takers. Two such problems are the maintenance of test quality and score equating.

> Test takers should have assurance that their tests have been scored accurately.

Scoring errors are possible, and consequently procedures to protect test takers from such instances are desirable. Releasing a scored test to the test taker after the testing is only one of several possible ways to provide this protection but is undesirable for the reasons stated above. Alternative procedures to insure correct scoring, such as optional hand scoring services to confirm scores, provide a less disruptive way of accomplishing the objective of assuring a test taker of fair scoring than total disclosure of the test and answer key.

> Test takers, and test users, should have assurance that the tests they are taking, or using, meet professional criteria of good question writing, validity, and reliability.

Measurement experts have developed extensive and rigorous procedures for constructing and validating tests. These procedures are detailed in the Standards for Educational and Psychological Tests, developed jointly by NCME and two other professional organizations and relied on in several court cases. Typically, admission test items are written in accordance with detailed content specifications; they are tried out in field studies; and they are reviewed with respect to content, correctness of answers, potential bias, and empirical properties. Reliability and validity studies are conducted and reported. In addition, measurement experts support an independent and extensive review process. For example, the several volumes of the Buros Mental Measurement Yearbooks alone contain may thousands of pages of critical test reviews.

Although NCME generally believes that the most widely used admission tests are of high quality, it recognizes its continuing obligation to monitor tests and test use. NCME also recognizes that in the typical professional review, the point of view of the test taker has not always been adequately represented. The conclusion to this statement provides a proposal for monitoring admission testing that emphasizes the rights and concerns of test takers.

What are Some Issues in the Admissions Testing Context?

Testing has become entangled with a variety of social and personal ideologies, some of which prompt people to argue for changes in educational admissions testing. First, some people object to any evaluation of an individual and, since tests produce some judgments, urge that tests be banned. NCME believes that the value of accurate assessments of relevant characteristics of individuals to the individuals themselves, to society, and to its institutions more than justify the continued use of tests.

Second, some tests have been viewed as sexually, racially, ethnically, or socio-economically biased because some groups perform less well on the tests than others. Although some interpret group differences in performance as bias in a test, it is now commonly understood among measurement experts that the mere existence of such group differences in performance is not evidence of bias. These differences may reflect individualities of health, growth, and achievement, some of which can be strengthened through increased services and opportunities. Few people suggest that differentials in school-related performances would disappear if there were no tests. Since achievement is desirable for our citizens, NCME believes it is socially constructive to attack the causes of the unequal performances that measuring instruments help discover.

Third, some people feel that ability and past achievement should not be a basis for school admissions and, thus, admission tests are not needed. The issue is whether colleges and universities are to provide universal high education, or whether some may choose the role of educating the more academically prepared at a more intensive and advanced level. Both roles seem to NCME to be socially desirable and NCME would not wish to rule out either. Where merit is considered in selection decisions, results from admissions tests can provide objective information about the achievements of individuals in the areas tested.

Fourth, admissions test information has occasionally been misused by individuals in spite of warnings in many test manuals. Misuse includes making admission decisions solely on the basis of test score data, over-interpreting insignificant differences in test performances, and evaluating teachers and schools inappropriately using the admissions test score data. Through its publications and conferences, NCME has committed much of its resources to the effort to reduce to a minimum such improper uses.

What is Needed?

NCME proposes the establishment of a broadly representative

Commission on the Conduct of Educational
Admissions Testing Programs.

The Commission's membership should reflect the interests of test takers, admissions and other institutional officers, parents, teachers, testing agencies, and the measurement profession.

The Commission should be charged with a single, long-term goal:

> Monitoring and improving the conduct of testing programs whose results are designed to be used in the selection and admissions process in American higher education.

Specific activities likely to lead to the realization of this goal are:

1. Developing a clear, workable set of principles that address the concerns of:

   (a) educators for reliable and valid information for use in the admissions/counseling/advisory processes,

   (b) test takers for information about tests and the testing process and for an equitable, accurate, and relevant assessment of their knowledge, skills, and abilities, and

   (c) society for selection procedures that result in an allocation of educational opportunities to a broad spectrum of qualified youth and adults in the population.

2. Seeking voluntary concurrence with these principles by test sponsors and developers and by officials of higher education institutions in the conduct of testing and admissions programs.

3. Establishing a mechanism by which each testing program can be evaluated with respect to the way in which the principles are reflected in its procedures and publications.

4. Reporting the results of these evaluations to the various concerned publics and, if necessary, issuing public censures when instances are detected of repeated divergence from the principles.

NCME Board of Directors
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